

Utah Deaf Women's Camp

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One day in 1964, two deaf women, Ilene Kinner and Lois Williams, talked about how much they missed camping as Girl Scouts and with “Mutual” (the LDS church’s Women’s Mutual Improvement Association). Just for fun, they decided to set up a Utah Deaf Women’s Camp for those who were interested in going camping on the weekends. Finally after much preparation, approximately 20 to 30 women along with their young daughters went to Tanner’s Flat campground in Little Cottonwood



Tanner’s Flat Campground, 1964

Canyon in August 1964. They took their tents and set them up near the river and picnic tables. They swam in the river, played games, and ate. They had a great time! (Cochran & Kinner, personal communication, 2009).

The women did not gather again to camp until fourteen years later due to the responsibilities of rearing children, running households, and participating in community services and activities. During those years, the women missed the camping memories they had formed in 1964 and “screamed” for camping in order to get away from the

family, especially the kids. In 1978, four Deaf women, Ilene Kinner, Darlene Cochran, Dora Laramie, and Celia May Baldwin were determined to make the first Utah Deaf Women’s Camp the start of a long tradition.



Tanner’s Flat Campground, 1964

For starters, they looked for a lodge and found one owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints, Ogden Stake. The Ogden Stake allowed them to use the Camp Atoka Lodge in South Fork Canyon near Huntsville, Utah. The lodge looked like a log cabin

and it was extremely nice with a huge open room that would allow everyone to sleep. There were many bunks with mattresses.

Bathrooms, showers, and a kitchen were also provided. Everyone gathered to enjoy their camping fun.



Utah Deaf Women's first official camp, 1978

From then on, the Utah Deaf Women's Camp was held about every three years at Camp Atoka where

they reserved an acre on a camping ground with a bridge across the river in South Fork Canyon. The campground fostered many fond memories over the years. The women had fun throwing water at each other, playing volleyball, dining at picnic tables, enjoying a bonfire, making crafts, playing games, performing impromptu skits, and telling stories.

Oftentimes, the women cooked their Dutch oven meals – popular in Utah – over a campfire. Wikipedia.org describes a Dutch oven as “a thick-walled cast iron cooking pot with a tight-fitting lid.” (Dutch Oven) It can be used for



Dorene is cooking Dutch oven meals, 2008

boiling, baking, frying, roasting, and just about any other cooking use. It was used by early American settlers in the 18th and 19th centuries. Today, it is found that Dutch

ovens are used by more Utah families than in other states.

It may be due to the fact that many Utahns trace their ancestry to the early Mormon pioneers, who entered the Salt Lake Valley in the 1850s and made common use of the pots. In fact, the Mormon handcart companies proudly displayed a Dutch oven hanging from the front of their carts. Today, for many Mormon families, it is a unique and generational bonding to gather around a campfire after cooking a meal from the Dutch ovens and tell stories about their pioneer ancestors. In 1997, the Utah State Legislature approved *House Bill 203* designating the Dutch Oven as the official State Cooking Pot of Utah (Utah State Cooking Pot – Dutch Oven).

In all, the Utah Deaf Women's Camp reserved the lodge six times at Camp Atoka before the Ogden Branch moved out of the Ogden Stake to South Ogden. The women were saddened by the relocation and they missed their memorable camp, but the changes in the committee of the Utah Deaf Women's Camp eventually brought more opportunities for all.

Not wanting to give up their camping experience, they began looking for a new location. It was challenging to find an affordable campground. They also had to find a place that would be comfortable for older



Utah Deaf Women's Camp, 1984

women, which meant having a short distance to the lodge for activities and a restroom nearby. Most importantly, though, they desired a pleasant setting and a scenic view. In the end, they found campsites at Brighton Chalet, Monte Cristo, Camp Kiesel, YMCA's Camp Roger, and Elks Lodge Camp at Wapiti in Tooele, Utah (Cochran & Kinner,

personal communication, 2009).

An even bigger challenge for the campers was locating a suitable lodge. In 1992, they couldn't find a single one. They didn't want to cancel their camping trip, so they decided to "rough it" at the Monte Cristo campground. Just as some of them had done in 1964, they brought their own tents to set up. However, one problem they faced was the flies swarming over them while they were eating or using the water faucet site and the bathroom. A large tent was established for eating, making crafts, and playing games for those who preferred to remain inside. The others enjoyed the fresh air by hiking, playing outdoor games like scavenger hunts or sitting in a warm sunlit spot. In the evenings, they sat down

around a big bonfire and ate delicious s'mores for the first time. It was something different from their experience of camping in a lodge, and many of them enjoyed sleeping outside. For protection, they asked the rangers to check on them periodically throughout the night. They had a great time! After that, the Utah Deaf Women's Camp was held every two years – and almost always in a lodge.

In 2000, the Utah Deaf Women's Camp Committee realized they needed to earn more funds for the organization. They reached out to family, friends and the neighborhood and created a cookbook, *A*



Merla & Jessica, 2008. Merla enjoys wearing costumes and entertaining people.



Utah Deaf Women's Camp, 1990

Treasury of Recipes. The book contained over 1,000 recipes and the women sold hundreds of copies. They also held other fundraisers in the community.

At some point, the women realized they wanted to add another day and extend

the camp experience, and the Utah Deaf Women's Camp Committee granted the extension. From then on, the camping started on Wednesday afternoon and lasted through Saturday noon. Today the group still looks forward eagerly to the biannual camping trip.



Top L-R: Dorene & Deanne. Bottom L-R: Ilene, Merla & Jessica, 2008

The Utah Deaf Women's Camp is for every woman 18 years old or older. The average age in attendance is between 60 and 70.

The camp is not only attended by Utahns, but by several women from other states such as Idaho, California, New York, Arizona, and Washington State. The oldest woman to attend the camp was age 75 at the time, and she enjoyed it very much (Cochran & Kinner, personal communication, 2009).

Teams are formed at the Deaf Women's Camp and each team is delegated a responsibility such as cooking meals, washing dishes, serving food, cleaning, and so forth. After the day's chores are done and the sun goes down, most of the women stay up late into the



Jessica & Merla in her costume, 2008

night to play games and chat.

Over time, the purpose of the Utah Deaf Women's Camp has expanded to developing self-esteem, fostering teamwork, providing service opportunities, and teaching new skills while offering peer interaction, stress relief and fun. In 2002, a Presidential Award was given

to the Utah Deaf Women's Camp by the Utah Association for the Deaf in recognition of its many years of service to Utah's Deaf women. Ilene Kinner accepted the award on behalf of the Utah Deaf Women's Camp. Since its founding in 1964, Ilene has faithfully served the Deaf



Camp Wapiti

Women's Camp without missing one campout. The women credit Ilene's loyalty and determination for keeping the Utah Deaf Women's Camp going. Her work has enabled many enjoyable camping experiences that won't be forgotten by those in attendance.

Following are the years the Utah Deaf Women's Camp has enjoyed camping:

- Tanner's Flat - August 19, 1964
- Camp Atoka - June 15-17, 1978
- Camp Atoka - July 9-11, 1981
- Camp Atoka - August 9-11, 1984
- Brighton Chalet - July 18-20, 1990
- Monte Cristo - June 18-20, 1992
- Camp Atoka - June 15-18, 1994
- Camp Atoka - July 10-13, 1996
- Camp Atoka - July 29-August 1, 1998
- Camp Kiesel - August 16-19, 2000
- Camp Roger - August 14-17, 2002
- Camp Roger - August 4-7, 2004
- Camp Wapiti - August 13-16, 2008
- Camp Wapiti - July 7-10, 2010
- Camp Wapiti - Aug 7-10, 2012

Note

Darlene Cochran & Ilene Kinner, interview by Jodi B. Kinner, "Utah Deaf Women's Camp," 2009.

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